

01.2015



newsletter

BRAZ-TESOL

**WE NEED
TO TALK
ABOUT OUR
ENGLISH**

LANGUAGE
DEVELOPMENT
FOR TEACHERS



MEASURING
RESULTS



THE GREAT
BrELT CHAT



THE IMPORTANCE OF
DELEGATING



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 **BRAZ-TESOL**

BRAZ-TESOL

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DEAR BRAZ-TESOLERS,

I am ever so happy to be writing this message to you, my first one as the new BRAZ-TESOL President, welcoming you all to what seems to be a very exciting year for our Association. This is the first newsletter edited by our Second-Vice President, Higor Cavalcante, and we hope you enjoy this edition. Remember, we count on all of you to share your ideas with us, so drop Higor a line if you wish to write about something.

We start a new year with exciting new ideas and a brand new team working together as well. As President I count on the immediate support of the Executive Board, with Henrick Oprea as the First-Vice President, Higor Cavalcante, as Second Vice-President, our Secretary, Adriana Lima in her second mandate in the role, and Marcelo Barros as our Treasurer. Yet I also require the support of the Advisory Council, which includes Damian Williams, Jeff Stranks, Virginia Garcia, Veruska Gallo, Graeme Hodgson and Fernando Guarany, and contrary to popular belief, they don't just "advise" the Executive Board, they do tons of stuff, such as liaise with the Chapters and the SIGS, conduct and organise the webinars, support us with the APLIs and the committees when we are organising a BT national event.

BRAZ-TESOL is all about union and working with a single purpose in mind: that of fostering professional development amongst our associates and fellow teachers, who may not as yet be members of BRAZ-TESOL, but may quite soon decide to join this Brazil-wide community. We hope to represent the myriad of professionals working within the ELT community in Brazil and to this end we always count on you all to let us know what you would like



to have as a member of the Association. You are always welcome to contact us via our Facebook page or via our e-mails, which you can find on the BRAZ-TESOL site.

This year we are planning a number of local events via the Chapters and very soon we will share with you all the year-long plan for all the Chapters. The SIGS will also be running events for you, sometimes in cities where there are Chapters and many times in cities and towns where there are no Chapters, to ensure teachers throughout Brazil benefit from BRAZ-TESOL events. We are also running monthly webinars for the community in general, so we spread the possibility of professional development to everyone who has access to the internet but cannot necessarily travel far or leave their work routine in order to attend a professional development event.

On July 17th-18th we are running the BRAZ-TESOL Technology Seminar and we will launch the site in a few weeks, listing the national and international speakers and the mini-workshops you will all be able to attend. We will livestream some of the plenaries so we ensure we can share new ideas with colleagues around Brazil. We hope that our Campus Party space at the event will allow for a great deal of networking and the sharing of new and exciting possibilities for technology and ELT.

All in all, 2015 promises to be a busy and wonderful year for BRAZ-TESOL and we are happy to have you all alongside us, helping us build a new future for all in the field of ELT.

Valéria França
BRAZ-TESOL President

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DEAR BRAZ-TESOLERS,

First and foremost, it is an honor to be writing to you all as the editor of our quarterly magazine for the first time. I have been a fan of this association for as long as I've been a teacher, and have read avidly every single article in every issue of this newsletter. So many great teachers have shared inspired and inspiring accounts of the great work they do around the country (and the world!) that it is truly humbling now to be at the helm of the magazine. Thank you all! I also want to thank Virginia Garcia, my brilliant predecessor, for all the great work she did as editor of the BT Newsletter and for the invaluable tips she offered me.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that this is also the first quarterly publication of our new board. What a privilege it is to be working alongside such ELT giants as our president Valéria Benévolo França, first vice president Henrick Oprea, secretary Adriana Lima and treasurer (and former president) Marcelo Barros, as well as our brilliant advisory council. We are all planning great things for our association and are very committed to making this an even more awe-inspiring organization, and we're counting on your help and support.

One of these great things we're planning for you is a series of monthly webinars, starting now in March. By the time you read this, we'll have had the first one, on the importance of language development for teachers, which I presented on March 27 to a great group of teachers. This webinar was recorded and can be watched on the Braz-TESOL channel on Big Marker (<https://www.bigmarker.com/communities/BRAZ-TESOL/bulletin>). Please stay tuned to our channel there, as well as our Facebook page and website, for information about the three great webinars we're still hosting this semester, at the end of April, May and June.

Finally, and before giving you the lowdown on this issue's great articles, one last piece of fantastic news: We are very proud to announce our Braz-TESOL **Technology Seminar**, a riveting two-day event that will take place in São Paulo, at Cultura Inglesa Higienópolis, on July 17 and 18. Save these dates! Renowned speakers, a fantastic atmosphere and the chance to share experiences and learn from participants from all over. We look forward to seeing you all there!

In the first article in this issue, the great team behind the BrELT chat (Natália Guerreiro, Bruno Andrade, Priscila Mateini, Raquel Oliveira and Rose Bard) shares with us some of the secrets of their Facebook discussion group, which now boasts over 5000 members and holds biweekly meetings on several of the most pertinent issues language teachers in the most diverse contexts face on a daily basis. At the end of the article, you'll find testimonials from the group members themselves, attesting to how democratic and meaningful the discussions in the group are, and how incredibly helpful.

Our second article, by Piri Szabo, addresses the vital area of assessment in ELT. She says, for example, that "we cannot run the risk of getting to the end of the process and realizing the student has not achieved the goals", and goes on to discuss what to assess in our learners' performance and development and how to go about it, explaining seminal concepts such as validity, reliability and impact regarding standardized examinations.

This issue's third article focuses on how good delegation skills can save us a lot of time and contribute to effectiveness in our schools. Bruna Caltabiano explains that delegating is much more than simply passing work onto subordinates, and how it can be done so as to maximize and ensure success. It's all about investing time to save time, in her own words. A great read!

For articles 4 and 5, a brief introduction is in order.

Language development for teachers is, nobody can deny, a key aspect of professional development. It is undeniable that language improvement can be instrumental for a teacher's career prospects, and there seems to be abundant evidence of that. Taking a macro view of the issue, the vast majority of keynote speakers in international conferences, article writers in the most widely read ELT periodicals, course book and pedagogy book writers and the like are native speakers of English. The very few – in comparison – NNESTs (non-native English-speaking teachers) who succeed in becoming a member of this, so to speak, elite are undoubtedly proficient users of English. More locally, it is no news that many students seem to have a preference for teachers who have English as their first language, and that this may affect hiring policies in English schools all over the country (and, again, the world).

Could it be that there is a language element involved in all of that? Can we maybe curb this seemingly pervasive preference for native-speaking teachers and trainers in ELT by discussing the issue of a NNEST's knowledge of English more openly? Is it OK to talk about it?

In our fourth article, Daniel Shiro discusses how preparation for international exams can help teachers develop their use of the language and their confidence. He suggests that what most employers are looking for are teachers who show a balance between teaching techniques and language ability, and that this is not easy to find. He contends that by reaching a high level of proficiency in the language, which can be achieved via preparation for international exams, the teacher "has their chances of finding good jobs increased substantially".

In the fifth and last article in this issue, I write a little about how important I believe language development for teachers is, suggest it is the elephant in ELT's room, and share some opinions I've heard from friends and colleagues in ELT over the years about the importance of language development for teachers.

Many thanks for reading and see you next June!

Higor Cavalcante
Editor





BrELT, A SPACE FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional Development (PD) seems to be all the rage nowadays. However, there are places where PD goes beyond its sometimes stale buzz word status. On the internet one of such nooks is BrELT, a Facebook group of English Language Teaching professionals in Brazil (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/brelt/>).

BrELT's richness lies in the diversity of its more than 5,000 members. The community boasts school and language institute teachers, novices and teacher trainers, materials-light educators and coursebook writers, General English and ESP practitioners, Brazilians from birth or at heart, professionals who type from a megalopolis and others from tiny specks on the map, private hires, state employees and the

self-employed, and so on, so forth. All those different perspectives and experiences congregate at the Facebook community. Not only do members share links and activities there, but they also exchange ideas in member-initiated posts and in BrELT's fortnightly chats.

BrELT chats have been held since April 2011, first on Twitter and then on Facebook. The topics are suggested and chosen by the very community, and the moderators and members often look for texts and videos which can enrich the debate. Among some of last year's discussion themes were teachers' own linguistic competence, critical teaching, games for language learning, limitations of the Communicative Approach, being authoritative rather than authoritarian, and how to help students incorporate vocabulary and grammar into speech.

On top of that great crop of BrELT Chats, 2014 was a year of experimentation. Moderators Priscila Mateini and Henrick Oprea took advantage of the Braz-Tesol Conference in João Pessoa to interview the author Scott Thornbury, thus launching BrELT's YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCL7HBtDcWnNwor5eO_hjxvA). YouTube was also used to make teasers and summaries of BrELT

Chats. Other tools employed for that purpose were Infographics, posters, and blog posts (<https://breltchat.wordpress.com/>). In April 2014, three years after the first Twitter chat, the community reached 3,000 members. To celebrate this milestone, a raffle was held, and the prizes were teacher development books and dictionaries kindly donated by Cambridge University Press, Macmillan, and Pearson.

Later in the year, BrELT held two webshops in English, in response to the community's growing requests for English language practice. Eduardo Zito presented tips for teaching vocabulary and Giselle Santos introduced 5 Google tools to make your life easier. On both occasions, participants were encouraged to interact and take active roles in the sessions. The main aim of the webshops is to get increasingly closer to a participatory workshop model rather than one-sided webinars. Hence, the participants have the opportunity to express in English their views on language learning and teaching and to learn not only from the guest presenters but also from the other members.

What started off as the Brazilian counterpart of the Twitter hashtag #ELTChat is now a vibrant Facebook community in its own right. If its growth in numbers is any indication of its success, BrELT wants to keep at it. The plans for 2015 include maintaining the chats, holding more webshops and continuing listening to member feedback, of course. We also intend to function as roving reporters in conferences such as IATEFL and LinFE, posting impressions and recording podcasts and video interviews with presenters and attendees. The goal here is to help publicize the events, stimulate teachers to attend their future editions, and most importantly to share the learning and the atmosphere with all those who could not be there. After all, as BrELT's favorite catchphrase goes, "sharing is caring."

Authors: BrELT's moderation team:

- **Bruno Andrade**, distance learning coordinator in Rio
- **Natália Guerreiro**, Aviation English tester in São José dos Campos - SP
- **Priscila Mateini**, teacher and mediator for students with special needs, São Gonçalo - RJ
- **Raquel Oliveira**, educator and coach based in Rio
- **Rose Bard**, English teacher based in Santa Catarina

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Voices from the community

"There are hundreds of ELT communities on Facebook, but I think what makes BrELT unique is the degree of discipline and focus its moderators bring to the whole thing. BrELT has been around for 4 years and it shows no signs of losing steam." **Luiz Otávio Barros**, SP, author.

"BrELT is a great way for reaching out to teachers all over Brazil. With my work at the British Council I often hear about free online materials, events or courses for teachers and this is an easy and quick way to share these teaching ideas and professional development opportunities. However, that's not all; I too benefit from the frequent posts and discussions. For ELT professionals like myself who don't meet up with teaching colleagues in the staff room on a regular basis, online professional learning networks like BrELT are important in order to ask for support, get inspiration and to keep up-to-date with ELT issues in Brazil and around the world." **Paula Boyce**, British Council (based in Rio), online ELT development coordinator

"I really like BrELT as I've met very nice people who are in the group and I really like the idea of sharing interesting tips, texts, and so on with experienced teachers as well as newbies. It's so good to have a place like this, especially when people are really keen on teaching, learning, and sharing! I've taken part in one of the chats they have and it was just great. I learned a lot from it. I wish I could join teachers in all chats." **Michele Schwertner**, Porto Alegre, private teacher, teacher trainer, and e-moderator

BrELT's richness lie
in the diversity of
its more than 5,000
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"Within BrELT we can face our weaknesses without judgment, and people always help us to improve."

Marina Macedo, Rio de Janeiro, language school teacher

"Like any other team, what makes BrELT special is the people who are part of it, always willing to help a fellow teacher with either advice or tools to improve their classes. That's how I feel about BrELT, not like any other Facebook group, but a team. Every member has its unique skill but when we all combine our skills, wonderful discussions and ideas spring up. I honestly feel very honored to be part of this team and I hope to contribute as much as I can with my set of skills." **Ramon Silveira**, Rio de Janeiro, partner in a bilingual school

"BrELT has a significant value in my career. Through its activities and the constant interaction among its members, I keep up-to-date on a variety of topics regarding English Language Teaching and learning. It is, after all, a group of teachers dedicated to the development of all members and of teaching itself all around Brazil." **Virgínia Borges de A. Cardoso**, Jataí – GO, English teacher at private English schools, small groups and 1-2-1.

"After I started working more independently, I felt a bit lonely. I missed the conversations about teaching, the informal exchange of views. It's amazing to connect and share with amazing educators on a weekly basis. Such a great learning experience!" **T. Veigga**, Rio de Janeiro, language school

"Taking part, either actively or passively, in the BrELT community has made all the difference. On a personal level, it provides me with the opportunity to make new friends and renew old bonds of friendship. On a professional level, the chats make me step outside my comfort zone and see things from a different perspective. Besides, they challenge me to try new techniques and strategies in my lessons. Thus, I can say without a shadow of a doubt that I have learnt a lot all these years.

Last but not least, I firmly believe the BrELT is a community of practice and as such it contributes to enhance the quality of English teaching in Brazil as it constantly encourages us to reflect on our teaching practice and to attend conferences and webinars."

Ana Paula Cypriano, Rio de Janeiro, English teacher at State Schools and at a private college

"I joined BrELT in 2012. At that time my professional life was going through a lot of changes and I was very disappointed with the ELT world and mainly with the market in Recife, where I live. I don't remember exactly how I found out about BrELT, but I joined it and became an active member, discussing ELT and educational topics with a fantastic group of teachers who I have learned a lot from. The best thing about BrELT is that it reaches teachers of English with different ages, level of experience, wants and needs. The readiness and goodwill on the part of moderators are amazing! In addition, BrELT is a place where we do share and care about each other and has the aim to inform and make as be better professionals. It has helped me to reflect on some of my practices, it has deepened my level of argumentation and, the best of all, it has contributed a lot to open my mind, to make me think outside the box and be aware of how many different realities, successes and failures we teachers face in our lives. It's a huge pleasure and honour to be part of it."

Roseli Serra, e-moderator from Recife





Piri Szabo

Piri Szabo is the regional director for Cambridge English Language Assessment in Brazil.

MEASURING RESULTS

Now that we can find so many different initiatives in Brazil regarding English teaching and learning, one of the primary concerns should be how to measure the efficacy of these programs. Of course we have to consider the purpose of each program. As Portuguese speakers on a Spanish continent we are still struggling to find the right approach in our current educational practice to measure and report results. As an ELT professional, I've always been aware of this fact but it was just one of the many issues to be considered in my everyday practice. Looking at this scenario I feel

that each initiative should find a comprehensive and robust approach to measure the outcomes (linguistic and non- linguistic) of the program.

I'm not going to present here the common terminology in language testing and assessment or the theory behind it. I would rather focus on the concept of "measuring results", so I'd like to answer three basic questions.

Why should we measure ?

What should we measure?

How should we measure?

Why should we measure results?

In general people argue that measuring results in language teaching is difficult as it is a very individual process. I totally agree but that is exactly the reason why we have to monitor and measure throughout the process. We can't run the risk of getting to the end of a process and realize that the student has not achieved the goals. Unfortunately this is a very common scenario in Brazil in all the different settings. It happens in regular schools, PLSs and also public and private initiatives.

If we collect data about what is happening as a result

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of the teaching and learning process in our Institution on a routine basis, we can make changes more quickly if things are not going the way we expect. The monitoring process should provide us with information that allows us to make important changes.

By measuring outcomes on a regular basis we can:

- monitor the impact of our teaching through measurable targets.
- monitor if our interventions have achieved the results we planned for and where we need to change strategy.
- improve the quality of our work and inform future planning.
- enable us to share learning across the organization and improve the quality of our program.
- be accountable to ourselves.

It is very important to mention that when setting the learning objectives and also when measuring results, the learners should be recognized for who they are and where they stand in achieving their goals. Their readiness to learn and orientation to learning should also be taken into consideration, as both of these assumptions center on learners' life tasks and problems.

What should we measure?

Most probably you all expect me to say we should measure linguistic outcomes. You are right, we have to measure **a learner's knowledge and performance in a given domain** as it is the primary purpose of the course. What we want to measure has to reflect the purpose and the objectives of a specific program or we might want to measure the global competence in the language.

However, I'd like to highlight that we can also measure **non- linguistic outcomes**. What has the student also learned/developed during the learning process that is not directly related to the language? Learning strategies (active strategic involvement in learning)? Language aptitude? Self-knowledge? For some reason we don't really analyze how much individual differences account for differences in language learning patterns. I definitely believe that psycholinguistic factors in language learning should receive more attention as they have a very strong influence on the whole process. Some of the non-linguistic outcomes can be measured.



How should we measure?

We can measure results in a formal or informal way. A huge part of the informal way is embedded in classroom activities but it can also be spontaneous and unplanned. Currently, the formal way to measure is planned and structured. It can be a test/quiz, a systematic set of observation of a student's oral performance, a journal, a portfolio or a standardized exam. In this case, we can measure the learners' global competence in the language and we are not limited to the course curriculum.

There are some very important points to consider when talking about standardized exams. Traditionally we used to consider VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY, but nowadays we should look at a more complete framework: VALIDITY, RELIABILITY, IMPACT, PRACTICALITY AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT.

(Principles of Good Practice-Quality management and validation in language assessment January 2013/ <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/images/22695-principles-of-good-practice.pdf>)

"VALIDITY is generally defined as the extent to which an assessment can be shown to produce scores and/or outcomes which are an accurate reflection of the test taker's true level of ability. It is concerned with the appropriateness and meaningfulness of the inferences made when using the test results within a particular social or educational context. Validation is therefore the process of accumulating evidence to support these interpretations."

"RELIABILITY concerns the extent to which test results are stable, consistent and free from errors of measurement."

"IMPACT: Assessment has important effect and consequences within the educational system and within society more widely. These effects are referred to as IMPACT. Test takers in particular are affected because the results of tests are used to make important decisions about them which can affect their lives."

"PRACTICALITY: It can be defined as the extent to which an examination is practicable in terms of the resources necessary to produce and administer it in its intended context and use. A practical examination is one that does not place an unreasonable demand on available resources."

"QUALITY MANAGEMENT is about achieving fitness for purpose and doing it consistently. Quality is therefore about all of the policies, processes and procedures that enable an organization to do this. It involves a drive for continual improvement, and is achieved by focusing on good planning, good record keeping and on cutting error and waste wherever possible."

My aim was not to discuss assessment in depth but to show the importance of measuring results. I know it is a very complex area but **"speaking English"** is being used increasingly as one of the key criteria for education and employment. With this comes a huge responsibility for schools, teachers, coordinators and directors. All stakeholders should be involved in the process of **"measuring results"** and they all should get a clear and accurate picture of a student's performance. We can't go on having students who study English for many years and at the end of the process can't produce. If we are involved in English teaching then we are all responsible and we should all **feel responsible** for delivering quality and results.

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Bruna

Bruna is the co-founder and academic director at Caltabiano Idiomias. She has a degree in Psychology and holds, among others, the Cambridge certificates CPE and ICET. She presents talks and workshops for teachers in national and international events on methodology, didactics, professional development, coordination, entrepreneurship and academic projects. She is the coordinator of the LAMSIG (Special Interest Group on Leadership and Management) at BRAZ-TESOL.



DOING IT ALL: WHY IS DELEGATING SUCH A TOUGH TASK?

Managing Language Teaching Organizations is not easy. We deal with basically everyone involved in the process: students, teachers, administrative staff, parents and service providers, among others. Delegating has countless benefits to school coordinators, directors and managers: it is a fantastic way to improve efficiency, enhance the loyalty of teachers and other employees, and reduce your own workload.

According to Luecke (2009), delegating is much more than just passing work off onto subordinates. It is a way of developing skills and organizational competencies among them. At first sight, delegation can feel like more hassle than it is worth. However, by delegating effectively, managers can hugely expand the amount of work that they can deliver, besides being a recipe for success: They will be working on something that is a high priority for them and the subordinates will be working on something meaningful and challenging. In a nutshell, some of the benefits are:

Reducing your workload and your stress by removing from your to-do list tasks that others are qualified to do. This increases the time you have to focus on projects that require particular skills and

authority, increasing the amount of time available for essential managerial skills. You will have time to do strategic work;

To get trust, you must give trust, and delegating is one way of doing it;

You'll have a good estimate of that person's strengths and weaknesses;

By delegating effectively, managers can hugely expand the amount of work that they can deliver, besides being a recipe for success.

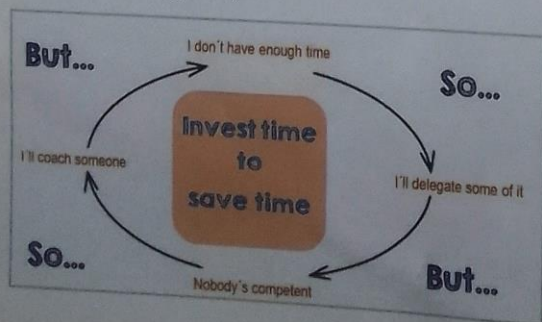
Effective delegation involves the stimulus of increased responsibility and can provide a delegate with an enriched level of satisfaction as well as a greater sense of worth.

Mintzberg states in his book published in 1973 that delegation was the most significant managerial problem back then. It is still a relevant topic, for years have passed and it continues to be one of the most difficult elements in a manager's job (White et al, 2008), being a tough task for school directors, managers and coordinators. And why is it so difficult?

To start with, delegation makes some managers uneasy. They fear losing control of staff and projects, and they worry that they are abdicating responsibility. However, in reality, delegation implies that the manager retains authority, control and responsibility. To do otherwise would be abdication. Some common excuses to avoid delegation are: thinking you can do better or faster than other members of your staff, thinking your staff will resent the additional work, not having enough confidence in your staff, liking things done your way, and thinking it is easier to do things yourself. Are any of those excuses holding you back? If so, it's time to change – to begin looking for more opportunities to delegate work to people who can handle it.

According to Heller, 1998, managers feel fearful that something might go wrong, which will bring serious problems with their clients. Also, we must trust our team and supervise, so that things won't go wrong - possessive feelings about work are negative and unproductive. Delegation involves the loss of direct control but the retention of overall responsibility and when you recognize the barriers that are preventing you from delegating effectively, you are more than halfway toward dealing with them.

Be aware that, by delegating, you are investing time to save time! (Figure 1)



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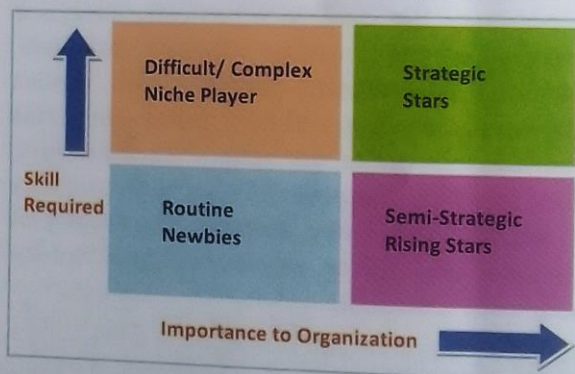
Once you've resolved to take advantage of the benefit of delegating, you need a method of doing it well. Many people sometimes think that when delegating, it is possible to forget about the task. But delegating is not throwing the issue to someone else. There is much more to it.

According to Luecke, 2009, the steps to successful delegation are: determining which tasks to delegate, identifying the right person for the job, assigning the task, monitoring progress and providing feedback, and evaluating performance.

Firstly, determine which tasks to delegate. Keep a detailed log for two weeks and note the activities you undertake and the time taken. You will probably realize that only a small amount of your time has been spent on the high-level activities that only you can do. Identify, then, opportunities for delegation.

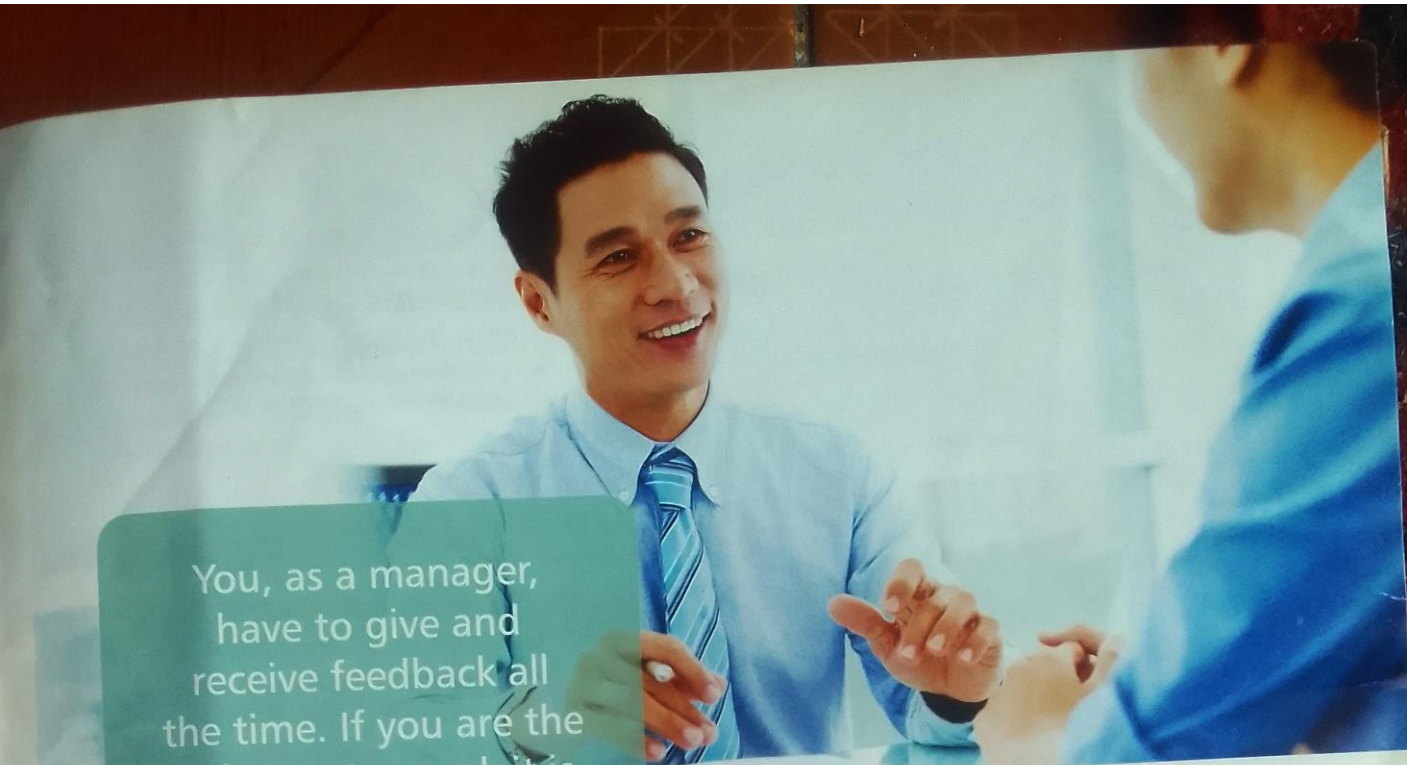
Secondly, identify the right person for the job. Consider aspects such as availability, interest in the task, capability and reliability, closeness to the problem or issue, and potential to benefit from the assignment.

Check, in figure 2, how strategic delegation works:



Next, assign the job itself. Be sure to cover the following aspects: where the task fits in the 'big picture', key details, support you will be providing, authority the person will have to make decisions, the expected outcome and the deadline. Agree upon parameters for providing ongoing feedback as needed. Your feedback will be seen as less intrusive if you and your staff member agree ahead of time about when and how you will provide it.

Now it is time to monitor the progress and provide feedback, which should be descriptive and not judgmental. Also, it should be specific, well-timed and focused on modifiable behavior. It is vital that the feedback works on both directions. It means you, as



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not feedback!

a manager, have to give and receive feedback all the time. If you are the only one to speak it is not feedback!

In the classic Harvard Business Review article written in the early 1970s, Oncken Jr and Wass cautioned managers never to allow subordinates to 'put the monkey' onto their backs whenever problems were encountered. It is often faster and easier to take back the monkey – or to do the job yourself but resist the urge to do so! You don't want to encourage this behavior. Try to help solve the difficulty instead. Providing positive reinforcement, helping employees assess the situation, encouraging the employee to come up with a solution, and providing coaching as needed.

Finally, evaluation is the final step in the delegation process. Once the task is completed, you should objectively evaluate how well it was done. This can be done quickly and informally or more formally, depending on the task. If delegation has not worked the way you expected, think of your responsibility as well (instructions, resources, deadline, employees' capability, supervision).

According to Luecke, 2009, the final analysis must include: employee's strengths and weaknesses, where training and development may be needed, and types of assignments the person is prepared to take on in the future.

I will finish this article quoting business journalist Hebert Casson, "As soon as a man climbs up to a high position, he must train his subordinates and trust them. They must relieve him of all small matters. He must be set free to think, to travel, to plan, to see important customers, to make improvements, to do all the big jobs of leadership".

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Daniel Shiro

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THE TEACHER AND THE PROFICIENCY CONUNDRUM

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to mentor and train quite a few teachers and speak to many more about teacher development and qualifications. Needless to say, teacher training and the development of teaching skills have dominated these conversations, but I often feel that whenever teachers' language ability and exam preparation are brought up, the response seems to be dismissive, to say the least.

Why isn't the level of language ability expected from teachers debated extensively?

While the debate over *native speaking teachers against non-native speaking* has gained notoriety and books such as *Grammar for English Language Teachers* by Martin Parrot have been published, why isn't the level of language ability expected from teachers debated extensively? Why is exam preparation for proficiency certificates often neglected? Let us take a closer look at some of the questions that frequently surface from these discussions.

Why have I never heard of any of these certificates before? This means they are not that important, right?

The first reason we do not frequently see a crowd of teachers wishing to prepare for proficiency exams is probably due to ignorance. Not ignorance in the sense of stupidity, far from that. What I mean is ignorance in the sense of not knowing what the language proficiency exams are or what purpose they serve. I must speak from experience, as I started my teaching career with virtually no knowledge of what teaching certificates and proficiency exams represented – even though I already held the Cambridge CAE at the time. This lack of knowledge is not uncommon among many teachers, and even many language institutions.

Past this initial ignorance, I started noticing the essential role certificates and language ability played in my development as a teacher and the doors they opened for me. This should be a strong argument in favour of preparing for a proficiency exam and improving your language skills: employment and career opportunities.

How can a certificate in language proficiency influence my career?

What most employers are, or should be, looking for are teachers who show a balance between teaching techniques and language ability. Since this seems to be a rare case in the current setting, a teacher who can strike a good balance between both has their chances of finding good jobs increased substantially. This is all the more true if the teacher holds certificates that attest these skills.

One point for concern is that many English teachers complain about the lack of good salaries, career opportunities and respect – while they do not seek to improve their skills and achieve higher qualifications. Reaching a high level of proficiency in the language and professional qualifications are certainly the best ways to justify such demands and raise the bar for everyone in the market.

Language proficiency also adds to the professional credibility before learners, parents and language institutions. After all, if certificates are highly regarded in professions ranging from Economy to Medicine, History to Science, why should it be any different with the language teaching profession?

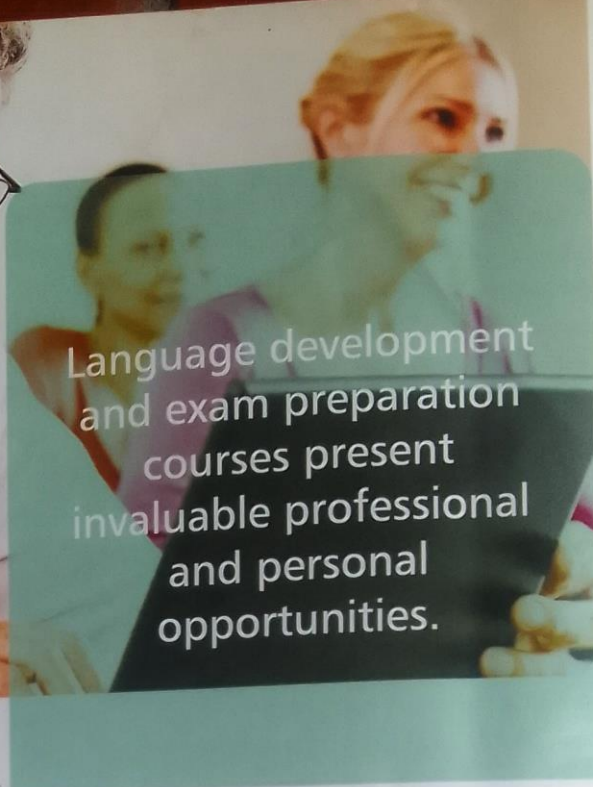
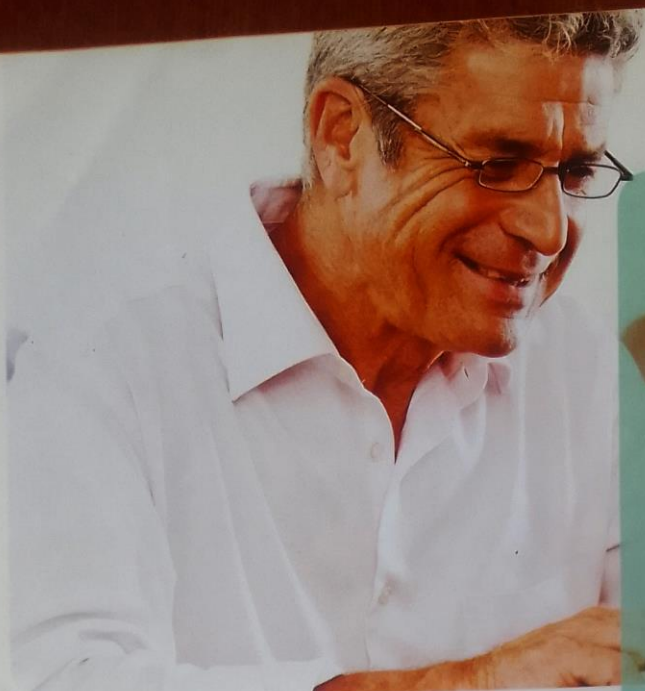
When it comes to minimum requirements for teaching English, the Cambridge English Teaching website brings a framework showing that proficient teachers must show language ability of at least Level B2 of the CEFR, while an expert teacher should be at least at C1 Level. Ideally though, I defend that language teachers should aim for a C2, equivalent to the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE). Most international teacher training and development programmes such as the Cambridge CELTA and Trinity CertTESOL may only accept trainees with at least C1 level. Therefore, those wishing to take any of these courses should also aim at improving their language skills as soon as possible.

Ideally, I defend that language teachers should aim for a C2, equivalent to the Cambridge CPE.

If I am a good teacher, so I'm a good learner. Then, why not prepare for exams or improve language by myself?

Many would jump to the conclusion that grabbing a grammar book or reviewing all the language to be taught in preparation for a lesson would suffice in order to improve language ability. There are others who erroneously believe conversing with students is a way to provide 'maintenance' to their own fluency. Nevertheless, the focus and scope of the grammar taught in regular English courses (and even in the business-focused ones) are often restricted or simplified in order to help learners assimilate and promptly use the exponents presented. Therefore, teachers need to have some time to focus on expanding their knowledge of the language themselves.

Yes, self-study plays a key role in any exam preparation course. After all, one or two lessons a week will serve more as a means to clarify your questions, provide practice which would otherwise be difficult to be done at home and to receive guidance from a tutor. Another consideration to be made is that self-study may work well if you are a highly disciplined teacher who excels at organising your time, which is not always the case. Having an exams teacher and a group can help establish a study routine, with constant feedback and motivation.



Language development
and exam preparation
courses present
invaluable professional
and personal
opportunities.

Are language development and exam preparation the same thing? What should I expect?

Some programmes aim at helping teachers improve their language level rather than solely focusing on passing an exam. Others will be heavily focused on exam strategy. The choice depends basically on your objectives. If it is improving language ability, then a course which also offers language development seems to be the most obvious choice, since the end result will not only be having a certificate but also showing confidence while using the language flexibly in most situations.

One thing to keep in perspective is that developing language skills at C1 and C2 levels may take longer than from A1 to A2. This is because the lexical density and grammatical range are obviously larger. Therefore, you should not feel disheartened at the beginning of the course but use this as opportunity to notice the gap in your knowledge and skills. This is, without a doubt, a journey worth taking.

I'm still not convinced. It seems difficult. I don't know if I'm able to do it.

From what I have noticed, teachers seem to conjure up an extensive list of excuses not to take a course in

language development or exam preparation – quite similar to the ones we make to avoid exercising. Most will mention lack of time, resources, distance, or even insecurity and low self-esteem. Courses currently offered provide a plethora of options: online or face-to-face, one-to-one or in groups, short or long, etc. One will surely fit your needs. It is all a matter of finding an appropriate course and teacher who can offer the guidance and support you need.

Joining a course also offers clear benefits, such as the possibility of interacting and socialising with peers, who will ideally be fellow teachers sharing the same goals and facing the same challenges. This provides an enriching opportunity to exchange ideas and discuss a number of topics with people from possibly different backgrounds and generally the same language level as your own – not to mention receiving quality feedback and correction from a teacher.

All things considered, I again speak from experience when I say that language development and exam preparation courses present invaluable professional and personal opportunities, which are quite frequently overlooked. Teachers wishing to better their careers and their language ability should ask themselves whether to continue ignoring the need to improve and take action.

Higor Cavalcante

Higor Cavalcante has been in ELT for nearly 17 years, and he's currently Braz-TESOL's second vice president and president of its TD (Teacher Development) SIG. His main interests in ELT include phonology, extensive reading and language development for teachers. His email address is newsletter@braztesol.org.br.



CAN WE TALK ABOUT OUR ENGLISH?

Although we study English in regular education in Brazil for at least 8 years, a tourist would be hard-pressed to find a Brazilian who can speak enough English to help them find their way around a city, let alone one with whom they could have a friendly chat. Brazil – just like a multitude of other countries in the world, of course – is a monolingual nation. A much bigger problem, however, made even more serious by the fact that it does not seem to be acknowledged, is that the situation among teachers of English in Brazil, especially but not exclusively those working in regular education, is not very different: There is a very large number of English teachers in Brazil who simply cannot speak the language, and an even larger number of teachers with very limited communicative ability in English.

Being a NNEST (non-native English-speaking teacher) myself, I have always been fascinated by the language aspect of a teacher's development. Peter Medgyes says in *Non-Native Educators in English Language Teaching* – and I heartily agree – that 'the only way we NNS English teachers can command more respect (...) is through mastery of the English language.' He also says that 'an EFL teacher with faulty English may be compared to a music teacher who can play no musical instrument and sings out of tune', and that 'for NNS

English teachers to be effective, self-confident, and satisfied professionals, first we have to be near-native speakers of English. After all, throughout our career, this is the subject and language of most of our professional endeavors.'

As is obvious from his use of 'we' in the excerpt above, Peter Medgyes is himself a NNEST, from Hungary. Scott Thornbury and Jeremy Harmer, however, respectively native-speaking teachers from New Zealand and England, and two of the most respected and widely cited ELT writers in the world, seem to agree with Medgyes. Thornbury tells us that "among the consequences of (...) a limited knowledge of language are: a failure on the part of the teacher to anticipate learners' learning problems and a consequent inability to plan lessons that are pitched at the right level; (...) an inability to deal satisfactorily with errors, or to field learners' queries; and a general failure to earn the confidence of the learners due to a lack of basic terminology and ability to present new language clearly and efficiently (in *About Language*)". Harmer, similarly, says "teachers need to know a lot about the subject they are teaching. (...) Language teachers need to know how the language works. (...) a knowledge of the grammar system and understanding of the lexical system. (...) They need to be aware of

pronunciation features such as sounds, stress and intonation. (...) Students have a right to expect that teachers of the English language can explain straightforward grammar concepts, including how and when they are used. They expect their teachers to know the difference between the colloquial language that people use in informal conversation and the more formal language required in more formal settings" (in *The Practice of English Language Teaching*).

In fact, it would be very hard to find someone in ELT who would disagree with Medgyes, Thornbury and Harmer regarding the vital importance of English teachers knowing a lot about the language they teach. But if that is the case, and if indeed it is a fact that we teachers of English must know a lot about the language we teach, why don't we ever talk or write about it?

I have had the opportunity to attend quite a few talks by some of the most prominent ELT speakers in the world, and I have never seen any of them address the importance of language development for teachers with their NNEST audiences. In the IATEFL conferences I have had the pleasure to attend so far (in Brighton in 2011, Glasgow in 2012 and Liverpool in 2013) there was not a single talk on this issue in any of them. In the Braz-TESOL conference last year in João Pessoa, there was one talk that touched on the issue, if only very briefly, and I don't recall ever seeing an article in any ELT periodical that dealt exclusively with this very unproblematized area of a teacher's development.

Even though the global majority of English language teachers in the world is made up of NNESTs, the vast majority of ELT writers, conference speakers (especially in plenary sessions), teacher trainers and similarly high-profile positions in ELT are almost exclusively filled by NESTs (native English-speaking teachers). More specifically in Brazil – although conceivably all over the world – "NS teachers are preferred to NNS teachers, irrespective of their training or experience" (Scott Thornbury, in *An A-Z of ELT*); books aimed at teachers of English are nearly always written in Brazilian Portuguese; one can do a degree in English without ever hearing their professors utter a single word in the language they will one day teach, and so on. It is as though there were a tacit agreement in the ELT profession, especially among professionals in high places and opinion formers, not to address what seems to be the veritable elephant in the ELT room:

Even though the global majority of ELT teachers in the world are NNESTs, the vast majority of ELT writers, conference speakers etc. are NESTs.

A considerable number of NNESTs have very serious difficulty communicating in English (and in some cases simply cannot communicate in English at all), but we should not speak of that for fear of hurting their feelings.

I have over the years asked a number of colleagues and friends in ELT – both native and non-native speakers of English – if they agreed there was a certain avoidance among ELT professionals to discuss teachers' language, especially NNESTs', and in their opinion, this seeming 'gap' in the market is really there, glaringly so. Some excerpts (some translated from Portuguese):

– I know a few teachers who did the CAE test at the beginning of their careers and now, 5 or 10 years later, don't have that level anymore and would possibly not pass the CAE today. Some schools offer free courses for teachers taught by more experienced, more proficient teachers, but many don't take those courses and keep on teaching lower levels. (...) I don't know any SIGs or magazines that deal with that.

– Nope. (...) Not a single book (in the area of language development for teachers). They (schools) tend to lump teachers and advanced students under the same generic umbrella. But if an advanced student says "slangs" it's not the end of the world. If a teacher does, it's another story I think.

– Some don't, some do (answering the question of whether teachers care about their language development). Some people don't really know their limitations and have never had proper feedback. There are people who look for courses and ways of improving, but they're still a minority, even if there are more people nowadays in that group than in the recent past, I think. As for the ELT market, I think there are many schools that simply don't want teachers to develop. They want someone who teaches a half-baked class and is happy with R\$ 10 (USD 3,00) per hour.

– I don't know anything that exclusively concerns itself with language development. There are chapters in some books talking about teacher's development, but not specifically about language development. Richards (2011) talks about the importance of developing confidence and fluency, but does not talk about how to do so.

Some harsher than others, but there seems to be very little doubt in their minds – and in mine, most definitely – that we tend not to consider language development as being an integral part of teacher

development. It's apparently more important – in today's TD discussions, anyway – to be proficient in classroom technology than in English. Demanding high from our students is also apparently a lot more worthy of study and discussion than proficiency in English. Actually, there doesn't seem to be a single topic in the realm of TD that is not more important than a teacher's language proficiency. Now, I'm a great enthusiast of technology in the classroom, Demand High, extensive reading, oral correction, Dogme etc, but I just can't get my head around the fact many of us believe knowing (a lot about) English is not, at the very least, just as important as everything else, or that we should somehow take for granted every teacher is linguistically – for lack of a better word – 'ready'.

I'll end here then by repeating the question in the title of this article: Can we talk about our English? Would it be acceptable for us to start addressing the elephant in our room, or shall we just keep on accepting it when schools and students systematically prefer native-speakers over us simply on account of where they are from?

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